Victimised by union leaders

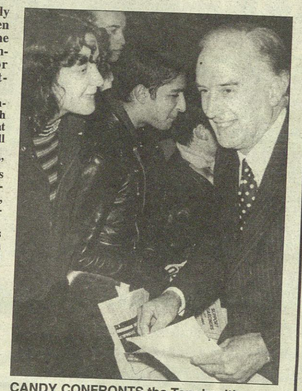
Candy Udwin–25 years fighting for our health service

CANDY UDWIN is a medical receptionist at UCLH hospitals in central London.

She has devoted the last 25 years to fighting for a decent health service. Yet now, disgracefully, Candy is also being forced to fight leaders of her own union, UNISON.

They are victimising her and another UNISON branch officer, Dave Carr, for fighting against New Labour's privatisation of UCLH.

Candy is standing as a socialist candidate in the election for the Greater London Assembly. She talked to *Socialist Worker*.



CANDY CONFRONTS the Tory health minister in the early 1980s

"I FIRST got actively involved in 1976 when my local hospital, the Elizabeth Garrett Anderson Hospital for women, was threatened with closure.

The Labour government was pushing through a swathe of cuts. It meant the closure of 100 small hospitals in London.

The "Save the EGA" campaign became a focus for people's anger. It involved women's groups, trade unions and community activists.

We organised strikes and demonstrations. In 1976 local hospitals and council workers went on strike in our support.

We occupied the health authority. We were taught how to occupy by pensioners who had occupied the Ritz hotel in the 1930s against unemployment.

The public service unions, against the wishes of the TUC, called a national day of action over the cuts.

Future New Labour health minister Frank Dobson was then leader of Camden council and gave his support.

We began a "work-in" at the EGA, which was amazing.

I wrote a pamphlet called *Keeping Hospitals Open: How to Occupy your Hospital*.

In 1979 we won, keeping the EGA open as a gynaecological hospital.

I started working at what is now UCH in 1980. Two years later there was a wave of one day pay strikes which really took our union leaders aback.

At our hospital ancillary staff and some nurses went on strike. Camden council workers struck four times in our support.

Tom Sawyer, a NUPE full timer who went on to be the Labour Party general secretary, marched alongside me on a demonstration.

The next wave of action that hit the hospitals was in 1988, sparked by the crisis in the health service under the Tories.

Just like this Christmas, there was a spate of horror stories about the state of the NHS.

A group of nurses in Manchester went on strike. This set light to the anger over the NHS.

We organised a day of strike action.

It was tremendous. At UCH and Middlesex hospitals nurses streamed out the door. They set off a fire alarm in the nurse's home to make sure everyone was up on time for the picket line.

Thousands converged on Trafalgar Square. The police said we could not demonstrate, but they couldn't stop us.

Our action forced the Tories to put a billion pounds of extra money into the health service.

In London not many nurses had been in the union. But student nurses joined the union in droves in 1988. We recruited 109 student nurses to NUPE in a week.

I was elected NUPE branch secretary in 1990. Soon afterwards the Tories threatened massive hospital closures in London.

Cart

In 1992 we organised a spate of one day strikes.

When bosses tried to close the only male surgical ward, nurses refused to leave. We struck and won solidarity from patients and the local community.

When bosses threatened to cart out the patients from the occupied ward, we said they would have to move them through a barricade of staff and television cameras.

The management gave in and that ward is still open today.

In 1993, when the proposed closure of what was then UCH was made public, we set up a campaign.

Across Camden people put up posters and petitions in pubs and clubs, tenants associations and local workplaces.

In September 1993 we struck for six weeks.

Future New Labour ministers like David Blunkett and our local MPs Frank Dobson and Glenda Jackson visited us. Tessa Jowell, now a health minister, joined one demonstration.

We won, and the trust is still getting an extra £1.8 million a year of "transitional funding".

When Dobson came down during the strike, management threw him out of the hospital.

The next time Dobson visited he was New Labour secretary of state for health. Now he was pushing privatisation.

When we met him he couldn't look us in the eye.

Our union leaders have no alternative to New Labour and the market. So they have turned their fire on union activists.

What has made the most difference over the last 20 or so years is being an active socialist. I joined the Socialist Workers Party in 1982.

The sense of anger about the world is deeper now than in any of those 25 years I've been fighting. That gives me great optimism for the future."

■ *Send messages of support to UCLH UNISON, c/o Middlesex Hospital, Mortimer Street, London W1N 8AA. Fax/phone 020 7323 1162.*

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW

Pictures: JESS HURD

RAGE AGAINST THE SYSTEM

OVER 12,500 young people saw US band Rage Against the Machine (RATM) and Asian Dub Foundation (ADF) in London last week.

The concert was like an anti-capitalist carnival. Stalls defending political prisoners Mumia Abu-Jamal and Satpal Ram ringed the arena. During the concert thousands of fans chanted, "Freedom for Mumia."

School student *ROBYN MILLS* and *MARTIN SMITH* talked to RATM's Tom Morello.

When I went to college I got involved in the anti-apartheid movement and I went on anti Ku Klux Klan demonstrations in Boston.

HOW DO you think society is going to change?

I AM a socialist.

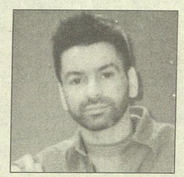
It is obvious that in the workplace you have the power to stop the engines.

But I would never want to put any parameters on who's invited to the party. As far as I'm concerned it was vital at Seattle that everyone was welcome.

The band's support is more student based. But when we play a RATM show I look out and see all those young people and I think to myself that someday soon they are going to be workers.

I am very encouraged by Seattle and at the events that happen at a RATM show every night.

TOM MORELLO



PANDIT G of ADF

Free Satpal Ram now

IN 1986 Satpal Ram, a young Asian man, defended himself in a racist attack. One of his attackers died and Satpal was convicted of murder.

Asian Dub Foundation have campaigned tirelessly for his release.

ADF member Pandit G explains why everyone should back the campaign:

"It's brilliant that RATM are raising the issue of Mumia.

"But it's also important that cases of injustice committed by the British state and police are raised.

"Satpal has suffered beatings at the hands of prison guards and is constantly being moved from one prison to another.

"Satpal's stand against injustice should be an inspiration for everyone."

■ *Free Satpal Ram Campaign, c/o 101 Villa Road, Handsworth, Birmingham B19 1NH.*

"*RATM TELL the truth—the system is rotten. Capitalism is destroying our planet, Tony Blair supplies arms to fascist dictators and the police are terrorising black people. We've got to find a better way to live.*"

■ **ANGELA SOUTHWARD, school student from Barnet**

"*RATM sing about what life is really like. They're opposed to New Labour's Tory values.*

***We support the band's campaign to free Mumia Abu-Jamal.*"**

■ **Student SAMUEL JONES from Liphook, Hampshire, and office worker LUKE EDWARDS from Andover, Hampshire**

Mumia must live

IN JUST over three weeks time a US judge will begin considering whether radical black journalist Mumia Abu-Jamal will be put to death or granted a retrial.

Mumia, a former Black Panther, was framed for murder and has been on death row for 17 years.

RATM are calling on everyone to get involved in the campaign to stop Mumia being executed.

Tom says, "It has been the international outcry that has kept Mumia alive.

"Labour organisations [trade unions] and Amnesty International have raised their fists and said that Mumia is a political prisoner.

"Make no mistake, he is in jail because of his race and his political beliefs.

"RATM are trying to make people aware of his case. The campaign needs money because unfortunately in the US justice costs cash.

"There are no rich people on death row in the US.

"The authorities would love to murder Mumia. We've got to make sure Mumia is not executed."

DEMONSTRATE FOR MUMIA

SATURDAY 4 MARCH

Central London, assemble 1pm, Embankment ⊖

Protests will also take place in major towns and cities around the country on 4 March

For more information contact the MUMIA MUST LIVE! campaign on 020 7538 5821

"*THEY'RE THE best band in the world. The message RATM are trying to get across to young people is, be anti-racist and make a stand against oppression.*"

■ **SARINA JESUDASON, 17 year old student from Dunstable, Bedfordshire**

HOW IMPORTANT was last year's Seattle protest to you?

SEATTLE was a wake up call.

It has made people see the necessity of mass organisation.

It was a rebellion of workers, environmentalists and students against the World Trade Organisation (WTO).

It was planned, it was well organised and it was smart.

It makes a massive impact when you shut down the WTO.

That's why the police reaction was so harsh. They realised that there was substance to the protest. It represented serious forces.

It shows that there is a silent majority in the US who are not just toeing the line.

All of us in the band were happy to see a few of the Seattle protesters wearing RATM T-shirts.

Right now we are working with some of the Seattle protest organisers. We want to bring the spirit of that protest onto our tour.

DID THE spirit of Seattle find its way into the making of your new video?

TWO DAYS before we arrived in Britain we shot a video for our new single, "Sleep Now in the Fire".

Radical film maker Michael Moore directed the video.

We shot the film on the steps of the Federal Building, which is across the street from the New York stock exchange.

We invited RATM fans to come along and join us in our video. Around 300 showed up.

Suddenly the police arrived and arrested Michael. They dragged him off to jail. The rest of us stormed the stock exchange.

About 200 of us got through the first set of doors, but our charge was stopped at the stock exchange's titanium not doors came crashing down.

Our protest stopped trading at the stock exchange for the last two hours of the day.

I guess we stopped downsizing for at least a couple of hours. It was a good day at the office.

What is amazing is that all of this is all going to be in the new video.

DO YOU think the commercial success of bands like RATM is partially due to young people's growing bitterness with society?

THERE HAVE always been bands trying to make political music.

But what is unprecedented is that RATM, an overtly political band, has sold 15 million records.

A lot of this has to do with the compelling nature of our music, which combines punk, hip-hop and hard rock.

We see our music as part of a cultural battlefield. We want to cut through the bullshit the system slams down young people's throats. We are trying to present an alternative view of the world.

RATM want to build a bridge between the music and the movement.

As well as doing a number of benefit gigs, the band also donates a proportion of every concert ticket sold to homeless charities, the Mumia campaign or the garment workers' union.

I've been arrested for civil disobedience. Zack, the band's singer, spends nearly all of his free time in Mexico supporting the Zapatistas' fight for freedom.

The key to bringing about change is not music—it's about being politically active.

HOW DID you become active in politics?

I GREW up in a political family.

My father was involved in the Kenyan independence movement, the Mau Mau, and my mother was active in civil rights movements and anti-censorship campaigns.

I was raised in the white suburb of Libertyville, which is near Chicago. There was only one black person, me, in a town of 14,000 people.

Being black in America is an instantly politicising experience.

Libertyville wasn't the most tolerant of places to live. My mother would find Ku Klux Klan material left in her office, and once a noose was hung up by some racist in her garage.

what do socialists say?

King, Gandhi and non-violent protest

MANY PEOPLE who yearn for an alternative to capitalism also hope there is a peaceful way to transform it.

Yet when non-violent protesters question the system's priorities they are frequently met with state repression—from arrests to teargas and, in extreme cases, live ammunition.

Socialists want to build a society where wars and violence no longer happen.

But is it possible to build a movement to challenge capitalism that has a principle of non-violence?

The black US civil rights activist Martin Luther King, and Gandhi, who campaigned to end British rule in India, are held up as proof that change can come through peaceful means.

But that is not true in either of these examples.

British rule in India reduced a country rich in resources to one where millions lived in dire poverty.

Gandhi was part of the educated middle classes who wanted the British out of India.

Like others of his class, Gandhi wanted a movement powerful enough to force Britain to leave. But he did not want it to spin out of middle class control and threaten to confront Indian business and leaders.

He always insisted his supporters obey the law, even though it was law imposed by Britain to defend its wealth and power.

During the "Quit India" movement in 1942-3, which sparked off huge clashes with the police and army, Gandhi appealed for calm.

The brutality of the British provoked mass strikes, peasant rebellions, armed attacks on police stations and the blowing up of railway lines.

In 1946 there were even bigger protests, a wave of strikes and a naval mutiny that united Hindus and Muslims.

It was these confrontations, rather than Gandhi, which convinced the British ruling class they had to leave the "ungovernable" India.

In the 1960s another bitter struggle took place. It was over civil rights for black people in the US.

In the Southern US the Jim Crow laws meant black people were segregated from whites and denied the right to vote.

Martin Luther King too came from a middle class background. He became leader of the 1955 Montgomery bus boycott, the campaign against segregation on the buses.

GANDHI

KING

Faced

King argued the way to end discrimination in the south was to stage non-violent protests against those who believed in segregation and the racist police.

The ensuing bloody battles forced President Kennedy to introduce civil rights laws in 1964 and his successor, Johnson, to put through the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

But these "non-violent" gains depended on the repressive force of the state, such as the National Guard, to implement the laws against the wishes of racists.

The US government would not play this role once King's protests spread to the north.

Black people there faced discrimination even though the Jim Crow laws did not apply.

King's protest movement now meant confrontation with the government.

Many black activists came to the conclusion that they needed more radical protests.

The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee members were increasingly influenced by the more militant Black Power ideas. Its leaders, such as Stokely Carmichael, began to talk of armed resistance.

The civil rights struggle hit the North after repeated police violence resulted in the Watts ghetto in Los Angeles exploding in a riot.

King himself was shifted leftwards by the experience of struggle and his recognition that racism was built deep into the system.

He broke with the government over the Vietnam War in 1967, saying the US should get out, and began to put across much more radical ideas.

King was on his way to support a strike by black workers in March 1968 when he was assassinated.

To have a principle of non-violence can be a barrier to people fighting back.

It can be used to attack those who defend themselves when the police weigh into demonstrators or strikers on a picket line.

The danger is that by making non-violence into a principle we also make it impossible to build a movement which can effectively take on capitalism, the most violent system that has ever existed.

by HELEN SHOOTER

Socialist Review

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